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THE PLATTSBURG CONTRIBUTION TO MILITARY TRAINING ¹

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I DID not know that anyone still thought we would never again need any of our boys to fight for their country. They may not necessarily have to fight on the firing line, but there is some place in the community where they will fit in. It would be entirely wrong for all of the two, three, five or ten millions to be on the firing line, because then there would be no one to feed them, clothe them, furnish them with the necessary ammunition, and replace those injured. In time of peace, we soldier men expect and want to conform to civil custom and civil usage. In time of war, if the nation is to be at all successful, things must run in a military way, and even those back on the farm and on the railroads and in the factories must know something of the military way.

In addition, we believe that a man is improved by military training, but it is not necessary that he be trained every hour of the day, or every day, any more than he takes physical exercise every hour of the day, or every day. The fact that he is only under military discipline for two hours of the day does not to me seem any more absurd than that he does not take more than two hours of physical exercise, or one hour, each day. In other words, the necessity for having him under military discipline all the time does not appear any greater than that he should be taking physical exercise all the time he is studying history or Latin.

Of course, anything short of universal training is from our point of view a make-shift. It is rather interesting in this connection to note that the only two English-speaking coun-

¹ Discussion at the evening meeting of the Academy of Political Science on May 18, 1916.

tries where they have universal military training are Australia and New Zealand. These are also the only two English-speaking countries that have woman suffrage and in which the representatives of organized labor are politically in power. The details as to who shall be exempt and at what ages the others shall serve, and the like, have been worked out and decided by the representatives of organized labor in those two countries, and from all I can learn, they have done it very well indeed.

One of the make-shift ways of dealing with our defense problem is the plan of giving four or five weeks of intensive, progressive military training, during the vacation period, to the youth of our country. That was started in 1913 at Gettysburg, where there were some two hundred college boys and students in their senior year at the high school gathered together for this practical instruction under regular army officers. Certain school masters, presidents of colleges, became so interested in this and so enthusiastic that they organized an advisory committee to extend the idea. Dr. Drinker, of Lehigh, was the leader, and the presidents of Cornell, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, the University of Illinois, and many others, are now on that committee. Largely through their efforts at their respective colleges and universities, the student camps grew each year until last summer the attendance throughout the country was about one thousand men.

The war in Europe had broken out in the meantime. Some of the older men who had been driving ambulances in Europe came back, and as one of them expressed it, "Any of us who have been over there and come back home are simply scared to death". They talked to their friends, and applications began to come from men who were over the age limit, thirty years. This was taken up with General Wood, who said that if we could get a hundred men to enroll he would hold a camp in continuation of the student camp at Plattsburg. When that camp opened there were over twelve hundred men, and then there was another camp of over five hundred men. Those men became so interested, and have interested so many others in what they consider a good cause, that tonight (May 18th)

there are eight thousand, seven hundred and seventy-three enrolled in 1916 for Plattsburg alone.¹

Camps are also to be held in the Central Department and in the West, and one is now running at Fort Oglethorpe at Chickamauga Park, in the South. We do not pretend to make officers by any means. The men who have been in these camps are most modest concerning their military knowledge. One of the first things they learn is that you can't make even one soldier between sun and sun. They really know a great deal more than they think they do, because with their intelligence and with the magnificent spirit in which they come to the camps, they are able to absorb a great deal more than the average man, and they work from daylight until long after dark.

The prime reason for the success of the camps is the magnificent spirit of the men who go to them. The effect upon us regular officers has been one of great encouragement. Here were eighteen hundred men who showed us, not only by word, but by deed, by sacrificing a full month of their vacations and also at some expense, that they looked upon our profession as something more than a survival of a medieval custom. It was an inspiration to have these men working right shoulder to shoulder with us, doing the same sort of work and wanting to learn all they possibly could in the short time they had.

It is a little more difficult for me to try to tell you what the civilians got from these camps. Our effort was to give them a fair idea of what the military profession is like, how complicated it is, how important it is that the man who is going out to lead other men in battle should know his business, so that it wouldn't be as it has been in all our previous wars, when very often the incompetent man was put in charge of the better man, either because he had had a few weeks of military training or had political influence. The men in these camps would come to us at night, after some of these drills, and say: "Why, I never realized how important it was to be able to look quickly

¹ On June 15, 1916, the number had increased to 12,321, for the Plattsburg Camps.
(655)

over the ground and then remember what it looked like after I had gotten down into the valley."

We give them a chance to try out the different arms, so that when trouble comes, if and when it does, they will have a fair idea as to the branch for which they are best fitted. We regular officers have often seen, in the Philippines and in the Spanish War, a good infantryman wasted in the engineer corps, good cavalry material in the infantry, or vice versa, because when war broke out the man volunteered with the nearest organization, which might not fit his particular ability at all, and there wasn't time to find out where he would be most useful. We never have had any organization before our wars have started. We have always organized our volunteer fire departments and built our fire engines after the fire has broken out.

This is the reason for our large pension list now. If either side had had an organized force of twenty thousand men at the outbreak of the Civil War, it would simply have been a question of how long it would have taken to march to the other's capital to finish the war. Instead of that, we went along and built up two huge and eventually magnificent armies. At the beginning they were simply two armed mobs.

I think I have time to tell you one Civil War story. At the French maneuvers in 1908, I was talking to a French general officer who had been a lieutenant in Mexico with Maximilian. He found that I had been in Mexico, and we discussed various places we both knew. I had on my blue uniform, the nearest we have to the old Union uniform. Finally one of his young staff officers said, "General, why did we get out of Mexico in such a hurry?" He laughed, and pointing his finger at me, said, "Because there were over a million trained men in that uniform who told us to get out and we would have been fools not to have hurried," and that was at the end of the greatest struggle this republic has had to go through in its history.

These camps are democratic. The men are assigned to tents in the order in which they report. No man knows whether he is going to be with his brother or an utter stranger.

It is like it is in the French army. At the French maneuvers we were riding into a village one evening with an officer of the general staff who was of the old aristocracy. There was a peasant standing beside the road and when the officer saw him he jumped off his horse and they embraced. Then he turned to us and said, "This man and I were together during our period of obligatory service in the ranks. *He and I are of the same class.* All the other men of our class in the vicinity are coming in tonight and we are going to have a reunion. He and I are of the same class." That is, they had been called to service at the same time and had served together for two years with the one same object—to prepare themselves to defend their country in time of need. Today I know that one of them is doing it, and I am sure the other is, if he isn't dead.

That was what we tried to teach at Plattsburg, perhaps more than anything else. There were no Jews nor Gentiles, Catholics nor Protestants, no men from Yale, nor Harvard, nor Columbia, no men from Illinois nor Missouri. They were simply good Americans, trying to prepare themselves to defend their country should their country ever need them.